

# Review: iPad Mini both delights and disappoints

November 6 2012, by Troy Wolverton

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I have mixed feelings about the iPad Mini, Apple's new pint-size tablet. I like its featherweight design, solid-feeling case and access to the entire library of applications available for the full-sized iPad. From those standpoints, it's worthy of its name and heritage, and many consumers are likely to love it.

But I'm disappointed by the Mini's high price, width, relatively low-resolution screen and a processor that's slower than the one in the bigger [iPad](#). In many ways, it feels like a typical first-generation Apple device: a fine product, but one with obvious shortcomings that the company will almost certainly address with future updates.

My advice is that unless you have an urgent need for a smaller iPad, you should hold out for next year's model.

The first thing you notice about the Mini is just how light it is. If you're used to holding the full-sized iPad, you'll immediately enjoy the difference. The Mini weighs less than half as much as the regular iPad.

It's also amazingly thin, thinner even than Apple's [iPhone 5](#), which itself feels extraordinarily compact. That makes it a delight to hold. It's lighter than most books, so you can hold it in your hand for long periods without straining your arm. That's not something you could say about the bigger iPad.

Like the full-size iPad, the Mini comes with a metal case, not a plastic one like the Nexus and Kindle Fire, giving it a more solid and durable feel.

But perhaps the best part of the Mini is that it can access and run all of the 275,000 apps created for the bigger iPad. That app library is one of the key advantages of Apple's tablets over [rivals](#).

Users of other tablets have far fewer customized apps available to them; instead, most were designed for smaller [smartphone](#) screens. Such apps typically don't work as well on a bigger screen. In my tests, the bigger iPad programs translated well to the iPad Mini's smaller screen. The text, graphics and buttons are typically smaller, but I found them just as easy to use.

I found other things to like about the Mini. Unlike the Nexus 7 or the Kindle Fire HD, Apple's small tablet has a rear camera. I don't take a lot of pictures on tablets, but it's nice to have the option. And unlike the Kindle Fire HD, [consumers](#) can soon buy a version of the iPad Mini that comes with a cellular data radio.

But I found other aspects of the Mini less compelling. It's a bit too wide to fit in most pockets, which makes it much less portable than the Nexus 7, say, or a typical e-reader. If you want to take it with you, you'll need a purse or bag of some kind.

Another shortcoming is that Apple appears to have cheaped out on some of the iPad Mini's components. Its processor is Apple's dual-core A5, which also powers the iPad 2 that Apple debuted 18 months ago. In speed tests I ran, the Mini performed significantly slower than the [iPhone](#) 5 and the newly updated full-size iPad.

You probably won't notice the difference on a day-to-day basis, but it could matter a lot in the not-so-distant future. With its older chip, the iPad Mini probably will stop being eligible for operating system updates long before the full-size iPad.

The Mini's screen is also subpar. Apple has been touting the "retina displays" of its recent devices, which are supposed to have resolutions so high that their individual pixels are invisible to the human eye.

The difference between a retina display and other screens isn't readily apparent - unless you've been using a device with one of the higher-resolution screens. If you have, you don't want to go back because the graininess of text and pictures on lower-resolution screens is obvious.

Apple's decision to not include a retina display with the Mini leaves the little tablet's screen outclassed by those of the [Kindle Fire](#) HD and the

[Nexus 7](#).

But the Mini's biggest problem is its price. Apple may not like it, but Google and Amazon have set the expectation that small tablets ought to cost about \$200, not more than \$300.

As nice as the Mini is, it's hard for me to recommend paying \$330 for it, especially when there's a good chance that the next version of the Mini will be significantly better.

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#### APPLE IPAD MINI TABLET:

-Troy's rating: 7.5 (out of 10)

-Likes: Thin, lightweight, solid-feeling design, access to large library of iPad apps, 5-megapixel rear camera, availability in two weeks of models with cellular data radios

-Dislikes: Pricey; too wide to fit in most pockets, slower processor than the full-size iPad, relatively low-resolution screen

-Specs: Dual-core Apple-designed A5 processor; 7.9-inch, 1024x768 display; 1.2 megapixel front and 5 megapixel rear cameras

-Price: Depending on storage capacity, Wi-Fi-only models range from \$330 to \$530 and cellular models range from \$460 to \$660.

-Web: [apple.com](http://apple.com)

**More information:** *Troy Wolverton is a technology columnist for the San Jose Mercury News.*

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